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SUBJECT: ANBAR: THE COWS COME HOME

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - PLEASE PROTECT ACCORDINGLY.

11. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

12. (U) Summary: Respected women in the community pitched a plan to form a women's cooperative for dairy products to help widows and divorcees in the Anbar province, in an effort to raise up this marginalized sector of society that is considered particularly vulnerable to insurgent activity. Their plan provides rural widows with cows to allow them to sell milk to a dairy factory in town run by other women. MNF-W approved their proposal and began helping put the plan in action. Land O' Lakes visited the Anbar province to assess the value chain for dairy products and resolved to help stand up the dairy factory. With the help of the Anbar PRT and Fallujah ePRT, fifty cows were purchased from local farmers to launch the project. End Summary.

A Project by Anbari Women for Anbari Women

13. (U) the leaders of a. In Spring of 2008, the civil society organization Women's Cultural Center of Fallujah pitched a plan to form a women's cooperative for dairy products to help widows and divorcees in the Anbar province, in an effort to raise up this marginalized sector of society that is considered particularly vulnerable to insurgent activity. The plan was to buy 50 cows, distributing one cow to each of 50 widows with enough land to sustain it and then building a factory in the city to produce cheese and butter and other dairy products. The milk is to be sold by the widows who live in the rural areas to the factory that will be run by the women in the city who need income. Together these leaders worked with the Marines of G9 and, with the support of the Anbar PRT and the Fallujah ePRT, were able to launch this project.

14. (U) Critical to the long-term success of the project was the support of local sheikhs who want to encourage the widows toward self-sufficiency and integration back into society. The widow pension system is broken and, culturally, supporting the widows is the sheikhs' responsibility, which they can't do as well as in the past because they are overextended.

Logistics

15. (U) The Marines turned to a veterinarian stationed at Camp Ramadi to develop a plan that incorporated as many contingencies as possible, including testing for diseases like tuberculosis, overcoming nutritional challenges for the cows and providing training for the women on updated agricultural practices and adequate veterinary care. The veterinarian met with the provincial DG of Veterinary Medicine to determine the best breed of cow for the widows. They decided a mixed breed cow - part Friesen from Holland and part Iraqi - would be ideal because Friesens produce a lot of milk but the Iraqi genetics were needed to help them endure the weather. The age of the cow, its likelihood to be or become pregnant and the age of its calves were also factors to consider.

16. (U) Outside help was needed to stand up the dairy factory and the Marines invited executives from Land 'O Lakes to visit Fallujah.

They conducted a feasibility study and an assessment of the dairy sector value chain from the farm to the market during their trip. They found a high demand for local dairy products in the urban areas and very little supply. Currently the dairy products available to consumers are imported. Imported products are more expensive and, because of transportation challenges, many of the products become spoiled before they arrive. In fact, milk that is collected in the area used to be sold to a milk collection facility in Fallujah. But, it was closed after being damaged in the war and won't reopen until scheduled CERP reconstruction is complete. Local milk is now sent to Abu Ghraib for dairy products sold to the Baghdad market. These findings reinforced the assumptions that a women's dairy products co-op could be successful in this area.

¶17. (U) The Land O' Lakes executives agreed to help build the dairy factory. It is important to note that Land O' Lakes will not be building the factory with their own income. Rather, they will obtain a grant to build the factory and provide training to the women. Once the widows in the rural area are educated about nutritional feeding and veterinary care and are enabled to overcome infrastructure challenges such as adequate water and electricity, and once the women in the city are trained on how to run a factory (bookkeeping, machine maintenance, marketing and management), then Land O' Lakes will remove themselves from the grant implementation program and the Anbari women's co-op will own the dairy factory.

Got Milk?

¶18. (U) The next step in the plan required further collaboration between the Marines, the Anbar PRT and the ePRT in Fallujah. With \$67,500 in CERP funds to kick-start the project, an amount sufficient to buy 50 cows for an average price of \$1000 each with additional funds for transportation and winter feed, representatives from each of these teams, including a USAID representative who practices veterinary medicine, visited the livestock exchange in Saqlawiyah. There they identified 14 cows that met the project criteria and were determined to be sufficiently healthy to produce milk.

¶19. (U). With just a few days to arrange for the purchase of the remaining cows, team members of PRT Anbar and ePRT Fallujah worked together with their local contacts to find 34 more cows that passed the veterinary health assessment and could be purchased for near-market prices. Two additional cows, for a total of 50, were purchased by the CSO leaders and reimbursed with CERP funds. A QRF grant will provide supplemental funds for initial veterinary care.

¶10. (U) MNF-W originally committed CERP funds for this project because the commanding general supported a concept developed by women for women that would be accomplished through women. Now the ePRT in Fallujah is considering building on the project to help more widows in the area. Together the Marines of G9, the Anbar PRT and the Fallujah ePRT all helped launch the women's co-op - a relatively small project that is now on its way to making a big difference in the lives of many in the province.

Comment

¶11. (SBU) In a tragic turn of events, as the team was purchasing cows at the livestock exchange, a local widow, unrelated to this project, strapped a bomb to herself and detonated it at the entrance of a hospital in Fallujah, killing herself, four others and severely wounding five more. The attack was a brutal reminder about how important it is to find opportunities to re-integrate these widows into society and how valuable a project like the women's dairy co-op can be to sustaining peace in Anbar. End Comment.

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